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THE ORIGIN AND CHARACTER OF DEUTERONOMY.

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THERE was no darker period in the history of Israel than the time of Manasseh. His father and predecessor, Hezekiah, had been in the main a good king, and had striven sincerely for reform in the religion of the people. Manasseh's reign was a period of reaction; not that he was content with restoring the conditions which had prevailed before Hezekiah's reforms; he appears rather to have attempted to eradicate the worship of Jehovah from the Jewish state. To that end new altars to strange gods were erected, and the leaders of the Jehovah worship were submitted to a bloody persecution without parallel in Hebrew history, even Ahab on the one side and Jehu on the other being no match for Manasseh in unrelenting cruelty.

There is apparently nothing to relieve the horror of this long period of half a century.¹ Jehovah worship was at an end, or could only be practiced in secret. The voice of prophecy was hushed. So far as we know, but one seer lifted up his voice in protest and warning, and his declaration of impending disaster was issued anonymously. His message, however, was sharp and clear: "Because Manasseh the king of Judah has committed these abominations, doing more wickedness even than the Amorites who were before him, and has also caused Judah to sin by his idols; therefore thus saith Jehovah the God of Israel, 'Behold I am about to bring evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, at which the ears of him who hears of it shall tingle'" (2 Kings 21:11, 12).

¹ The Chronicler tells us that Manasseh was carried a prisoner to Babylon, and there repented, and was restored to his throne by Jehovah (2 Chr. 33:11-13). This story is generally credited, but, as Stade and others have pointed out, there are some difficulties in accepting it. It is inconceivable that a matter of so great consequence should be omitted in Kings. There is no hint that Manasseh reformed in any particular. This heathen worship prevailed throughout his reign and that of Amon.

The young king, Josiah, came to the throne probably in 638 B. C. Of the first years of his reign we know nothing. The Chronicler refers some of his reforms to this early period, but there is every reason to believe that the order of events found in the book of Kings is the correct one. The king was too young to do much himself, and the evil influences of Manasseh's time still prevailed. The invasion of the Scythians, threatening the very existence of the state, and, on the other hand, the signs of quick decline in the Assyrian empire, must have made a profound impression upon the young king and pointed out to him a great future for his nation. In the eighteenth year of his reign (621 B. C.) he set about such repairs of the temple as were necessary to fit it for its sacred purposes as the house of Jehovah.

The work was going on under the direction of the chief priest, Hilki'ah. The king sent Shaphan and others with directions for Hilki'ah. The priest made reply to the orders of the king, and added, "I have found the book of the law in the house of Jehovah." Shaphan read the book, and then carried it to the king and read it to him. The king was deeply impressed by it, and, taking it as his guide, set in motion a much more thoroughgoing scheme of reform than he had before dreamed of.

This "book of the law" which Hilki'ah said he found in the temple certainly contained a portion of the book of Deuteronomy. But there are other questions concerning this mysterious book about which there has been decided difference of opinion. Whether it was the whole or only a part of Deuteronomy is not a matter of moment; but was the "book of the law" Deuteronomy *plus* something else? that is, was it Deuteronomy in whole or in part, as most modern critics hold, or was it the whole Pentateuch, as the older scholars and the ultra-conservatives generally hold?² Again, if Hilki'ah actually found it, how long had it been lost? Was it an ancient book which had been known before Manasseh's time, or had it been produced, say in the latter part of Hezekiah's time, and laid away in the temple without ever having been published? Did Hilki'ah

² Some of the Fathers, however, held that it was Deuteronomy which Hilki'ah found.

really find it, or was this what Cheyne calls "a needful illusion," the book having been just written to guide Josiah's reforms?

The important bearing of these questions on the pentateuchal problem is obvious. In fact, this seems to me the proper place to begin the study of that perplexing problem, because we are here on pretty firm historical ground, and have considerable data as our guide. If we can determine the questions raised by this "book of the law," it will be a long start towards settling the greater questions of the Pentateuch. If Hilki'ah's book of the law was only Deuteronomy, that fact would be a staggering blow to the traditional view of the Pentateuch; for the separate existence of one book at this period, and the complete ignorance or ignoring of the rest, the institution of great reforms on the lines of one book and in violation of the precepts of others, would render difficult, if not impossible, the belief that the whole had been the product of a single hand seven centuries before.

When we examine the evidence this much is clear: the great reforms of Josiah were founded upon the book of Deuteronomy, and there is no clear reference to any other part of the Pentateuch; in fact, it is held that Josiah's reforms stopped short of the Levitical law. But dogmatic assertions will not help us to get at the truth. We desire to look into the evidence ourselves. Of the great mass of evidence at our disposal only samples can be given. We shall consider the reasons urged in support of the view that the "book of the law" was the book of Deuteronomy.

When Hilki'ah handed Shaphan the book of the law, the latter read it through on the spot. The Pentateuch covers three hundred and fifty pages in the Hebrew Bible. If Shaphan read at the rate of thirty pages an hour, it would have taken him nearly twelve hours to complete his task. Now he had been sent by the king to the temple on an errand; he carries back Hilki'ah's answer to the king, and there is no hint of any unusual delay. The portion of Deuteronomy upon which Josiah's reformation is based (chaps. 12-26) covers twenty-three pages, and could be read at the rate suggested above in considerably less

than an hour.³ After the scribe had delivered Hilkiash's message, he added: "Hilkiash the priest has given me a book." He immediately read the book to the king, and this apparently on the same day.

The king rent his garments in dismay, and at once sent Hilkiash, Shaphan, and others to inquire of Jehovah on behalf of himself and the people "in regard to the words of this book which has been found, for great is the wrath of Jehovah which is kindled against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book by doing all that is written therein concerning us." The book was confirmed by the prophetess Huldah, whom the king's messengers consulted, but she declared that the woes should not fall in the time of the king, who had humbled himself before Jehovah. The king assembled the people, and they entered into a covenant to keep this law. The reforms were begun afresh and in such a manner as to insure against the further violation of this law. These reforms were carried out with much severity, cruelty, and bloodshed; but they all had a single purpose—to wipe off the face of the holy land every sanctuary except the temple at Jerusalem. The sins of his fathers, from which Josiah expected such disasters, were not their failure to "love mercy and to do justly," but their participation in the worship of the local sanctuaries. The code of the covenant expressly allows a multiplicity of altars (Ex. 20:24-26); the priest-code takes for granted that a second altar is impossible, while the deuteronomic code is strenuous in its insistence on but one central sanctuary.

The close connection between Josiah's reforms and the deuteronomic law can best be seen by a careful comparison of the following passages:

2 Kings 23:3-6; 7; 8, 9; 10; 23:11; 14; 21; 24; Deut. 12:2; 23:18; 18:6-8; 18:10; 17:3; 16:21, 22; 16:5; 18:11.

The book found by Hilkiash is called in Kings both the "book of the law" and the "book of the covenant" (2 Kings

³ If chaps. 5-26 be the original books, it still would take but little over an hour to read at the above rate. Kittel estimates that it would take twenty-three and a half hours to read the Pentateuch through aloud. He inclines to the belief that the book was read aloud twice on the same day. (*History of the Hebrews*, p. 59.)

23:2 f., 21). "Amongst the books we now possess the name 'book of the covenant' can only be applied, so far as we know, to the one mentioned in Ex. 24:7, or to Deuteronomy. The one mentioned in Exodus is put out of the question by the character of its contents. To this must be added that the other name, 'book of the law,' given to the work which Josiah knew, is the ordinary name for Deuteronomy both in the book itself and elsewhere."⁴

There is another strong reason for believing that this book of the law was the book of Deuteronomy. Jeremiah had begun to prophesy a short time before in connection with the Scythian invasion. The book of Deuteronomy is largely prophetic in its character, and Jeremiah could not fail to be influenced by it, and by the great reform movements to which it led. We find, indeed, that Jeremiah was expressly commanded to "hear the words of this covenant, and speak them unto the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; to *preach* them in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem;" to declare a curse upon the man who did not hearken to the words of this covenant (Jer. 11:1-8). A careful comparison of the passage in Jeremiah with the account in Kings and with Deuteronomy leaves no room for doubt that the prophet actually preached the book of Deuteronomy, not only to the people of the capital, but also in other parts of Judah. Moreover, no one can study Jeremiah's prophecies without seeing how much this new book of the law influenced his thought and even his words. A considerable list of the passages in which the prophet shows most the influence of Deuteronomy will be found in Driver's recent *Commentary on Deuteronomy*, p. xciii.

If the conclusion that the reformation of Josiah was based upon Deuteronomy is correct, the book could not have been written later than 621 B. C. Whether it was written long before or not, it is clear that no evidence of its existence can be found. Dean Stanley says truly that "during the reign of Manasseh there is no proof of its destruction. During the previous reigns, with two or three doubtful exceptions, there is no proof of its exist-

⁴Kittel, *History of the Hebrews*, pp. 59 f.

ence. David, Solomon, Asa, and Jehoshaphat had lived in constant, and apparently unconscious, violation of the ordinances which came home with such force to Josiah."⁵

We note that King Josiah was greatly surprised at the contents of the book. No one of those concerned give any hint that any memory of its contents had been preserved among them. The laws which the king immediately undertakes to put into effect appeared to him and to the people to be something new.

The argument from silence furnishes, however, the clearest evidence that the book of the law was really new. The history and the prophets afford us a pretty complete picture of the times before Josiah, but nowhere do we find a satisfactory reference to the peculiar ordinances of Deuteronomy. In fact, we find these laws constantly violated, and that by the most pious men. The worship on the "high places" was never questioned until Hezekiah's time, and was practiced by such godly men as Samuel and the others mentioned by Stanley. The prohibition of the sacred pillar⁶ is explicit: "Thou shalt not set up for thee a pillar which Jehovah thy God hateth" (Deut. 16:22). It is not likely that Isaiah would have sanctioned a violation of so express a law; yet, speaking of the time when Egypt would be saved through Jehovah's intervention, he says: "In that day there shall be an altar for Jehovah in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar by its border for Jehovah. And it (*i. e.*, the pillar) shall be for a sign and witness to Jehovah of Hosts in the land of Egypt when they shall cry unto Jehovah because of their oppressors, that he shall send them a savior" (Isa. 19:19, 20).

Much other evidence is available, but we must content ourselves by summarizing a few points from Driver. "The law of the kingdom (Deut. 17:14-20) is colored by reminiscences of the monarchy of Solomon." A supreme court is taken for granted as already existent (Deut. 17:8-13); according to the Chronicler this was instituted by Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 19:8-11). While Deuteronomy exercised a marked influence upon Jeremiah and almost every subsequent writer, the early prophets

⁵ *History of the Jewish Church*, II, 428.

⁶ Properly a consecrated stone.

show no trace of its influence. The language and style of Deuteronomy are such as belong to the seventh century before Christ. If this book could have been written six or seven centuries earlier, there would be no such thing as a history of the Hebrew language.

If the evidence convinces us that the book of Deuteronomy had never seen the light before 621 B. C., the question arises, Was it composed at that time and issued in the way which would give it most credence, and so lead to a reformation along the lines desired by its authors? If this conclusion is reached, it would appear that Hilkiah was chiefly concerned in its preparation. One shrinks from attributing what is persistently called a "pious fraud" to the priest and his fellows; although the moral aspect of this problem has been much exaggerated, as in ancient times it was not considered immoral to sail under the colors of an ancient worthy. The undoubted Mosaic element in the book would be a partial justification for calling it all by the name of the great lawgiver. There is, however, no necessity for assigning the book to this period. It seems wholly probable that Hilkiah spoke the literal truth when he said, "I have *found* the book of the law." Many hold that it was written during Manasseh's reign, but that it could not be issued in the face of such hostility to all that it insists upon so vigorously. It was accordingly laid aside for a more favorable time; Manasseh's reign was so long that the book was forgotten and might have been lost but for Hilkiah's timely discovery. This may seem simply to remove a stigma from Hilkiah in order to put it upon some unknown individual who composed the book. A sufficient justification is furnished by Kittel: "The author felt that he was propounding to his people Mosaic ideas and Mosaic ordinances, provided merely with a new dress and application. Still further, as a man of indubitably prophetic mind, he was conscious that, in giving new point to the ancient Mosaic ordinances, and in adapting to the needs of a more advanced, and in many respects, corrupt age, much that had originated with Moses, or in the course of time had been added in his spirit, and, therefore, under his name, he was filled with the special commission and the reveal-

ing light of God. Have we of today, who, with our modern ideas, can only with difficulty and to a slight extent transport ourselves into the spiritual life of those ancient days, the right to censure a man who so unmistakably bears the mark of the true God-inspired prophet? Have we a right to reproach him with fraud, pious or impious?"⁷

As to the character of Deuteronomy, but little need be said. The thing that strikes every attentive reader is its hortatory tone. The gifted author was not content with a simple declaration of what God had commanded or prohibited; he also uses his persuasive power to induce his hearers to do the one and to leave undone the other; he urges the blessings which follow upon a course of obedience, and the disasters which will follow disobedience. One cannot help thinking that it was partly this parenetic character of the book which made its simple reading so impressive to Josiah, and so quickly won it a hearing from the people. Indeed, the writer's whole purpose is not so much the revelation of new truths as the securing adherence to old ones. He uses the previous history freely, but always as a prophet, not as a historian. His references to the history have always a didactic purpose; he desired Israel to profit by the lessons of the past.

The high ethical character of the book is very marked. Driver says: "Duties involving directly the application of a moral principle are earnestly insisted on, particularly justice, integrity, equity, philanthropy, and generosity, and the laws embodying such principles are manifestly of paramount importance in the writer's eyes."⁸ "Love is to be the determining principle of their conduct, whether towards God or man."⁹

The absolute unity of God is everywhere insisted upon. But it is God in his gracious relations to the people of Israel that attracts the writer. God has brought Israel out of Egypt and prepared for him a long series of blessings. But God is a spiritual being, found only by the spirit, not by the senses; hence the determined war upon every form of idolatry. Driver does

⁷ *History of the Hebrews*, I, p. 65.

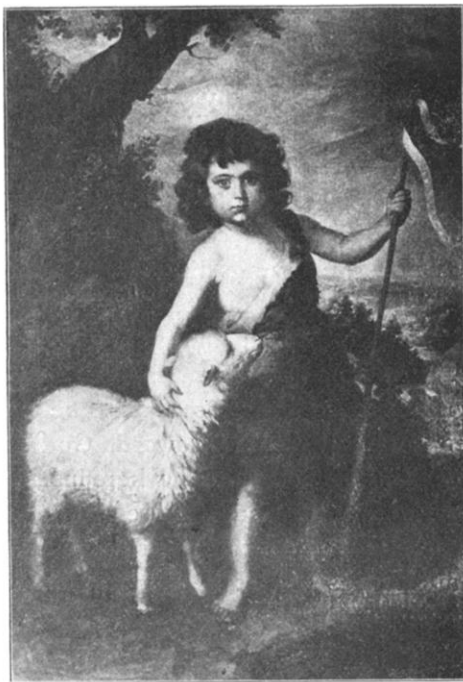
⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸ *Deuteronomy*, p. 23.

not exaggerate when he says: "The author wrote, it is evident, under a keen sense of the perils of idolatry; and to guard Israel against this by insisting earnestly on the debt of gratitude and obedience which it owes to its sovereign Lord, is the fundamental teaching of the book."¹⁰

Considering the high moral and religious character of this book, it is not surprising that the best members of the Jewish nation were greatly and helpfully influenced by it; nor is it singular that our blessed Lord's words should so plainly show that he had penetrated its very spirit.

¹⁰ *Deuteronomy*, p. 19.



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